



Testimony on RB 5362, An Act Targeting State Financial Aid to Support Technical Training

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Provided by Cathy Awwad, Executive Director, Northwestern CT Workforce Investment Board

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Good afternoon. My name is Cathy Awwad and I am the Executive Director of the Northwestern CT Workforce Investment Board one of the state's five Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs).

The partnership of Connecticut's Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), the CT Department of Labor and dozens of service delivery and training organizations that comprise CT's public workforce systems has established a strong track record of performance and innovation. Our partnership serves all job seekers including youth, economically disadvantaged adults, and recently laid-off workers. Amidst challenging economic conditions we work each day to help identify career pathways where people can return to work and secure the quality of life they seek for themselves and their families.

The Connecticut Department of Labor estimates that 48% of our state's labor market consists of middle-skilled jobs, including such occupations as nurses, automotive mechanics, general maintenance and repair workers, precision machinists and carpenters; however, only 40% of our state's workers are likely to have the necessary training for these jobs. And in the future with the demographic changes this situation will worsen. Middle skill jobs are those that require more than a high school diploma but less than a Bachelor's degree.

Many of the credentials required by employers do not require college degrees and therefore are not eligible for Pell grant funding. For instance many of the manufacturing and healthcare jobs require training beyond high school but less than an Associate's degree. Individuals with the aptitude and interest to pursue these programs must do so at their own expense. When the Workforce Investment Boards have federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) resources we use them for exactly this type of program. In addition, individuals have been eligible for training from the extensive federal awards brought to CT by the WIBs such as the \$20M in federal H1B programming currently being delivered across the state. However, more is needed as the WIA resources in particular are usually expended in the first six months of every fiscal year and the H1B grants are durational.

The state's Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) fully support this bill and its purpose to expand the use of state financial aid to support individuals to enroll in programs in key high demand occupational areas that lead to industry-recognized certificates or credentials. We will continue to use our WIA resources to support individuals in these programs but we know that employers have more demand for these skilled workers than we can fill with our federal resources.

The Governor and legislature have committed to offering businesses a variety of supports and incentives to grow their workforce. The availability of financial aid proposed in this bill can make sure people are ready to take advantage of these state programs and to meet the hiring expectations of employers. The WIBs look forward to the opportunity to continue to partner with the Office of Higher Education and the Board of Regents to support technical training and to shepherd the state investments to promote economic growth for our state.

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